



Executive Summary
2005 Comprehensive Case Review Report
Prepared by BMCW Program Evaluation Managers

March 2006

Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare
Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services
Division of Children and Family Services

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Introduction

Each year the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) conducts a comprehensive review of each program area. The 2005 Comprehensive Review was conducted between August 2005 and January 2006. The purpose of the review is to assess the work being performed in each BMCW program area by identifying strengths, areas of progress, concerns and trends. Ultimately, the review provides information that helps improve practice. After an analysis of the findings, we are able to make recommendations regarding training and skill development of staff or programmatic changes that may be required to ensure we meet our responsibility for the safety, well-being and achievement of permanence for children in our care.

The review was conducted by teams consisting of Program Evaluation Managers, BMCW Site Managers, Fiscal Evaluation Managers, other BMCW staff, and professionals from diverse agencies, institutions and advocacy groups familiar with child welfare issues. The community consultants were representatives from Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee Health Department, the District Attorney's Office at Children's Court, Milwaukee Mental Health Association, State Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Health Care Finance, Saint Aemilian-Lakeside, Task Force on Family Violence, Social Development Commission, COA Youth and Family Centers, In Their Best Interests, Neighborhood House and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

The review included cases from Intake, Initial Assessment, Independent Investigations, Safety Services, Ongoing Case Management, Adoption and Out-of-Home Care. Cases were selected for each program, either at random or according to pre-selected criteria, to ensure a diverse caseload for review. All programs and sites, with the exception of Intake, were asked to have caseworkers, family members, foster parents and/or service providers available for interviews with reviewers. All cases selected for review, except for the Out-of-Home Care program, were open at some time during the period from July 1, 2005 to September 30, 2005. The Out-of-Home Care sample was taken from children placed during November 2005.

The findings are based on a review of case files and data on the WiSACWIS data system, as well as insights and information obtained by interviews with case

managers, licensing and placement specialists, foster parents, service providers, parents and children receiving services through the BMCW, and Adolescent Assessment and Placement Stabilization Center staff.

Intake

Sample size: 60 cases (50 screened in, 10 screened out). All screened-in cases were also reviewed for work done by Initial Assessment.

Strengths:

- Screening decisions are appropriate.
- Responses to referrals made during non-business hours were appropriate.
- Rational for screening decisions was provided for both screened-in and screened-out referrals.

Concerns:

- Intake documented prior referrals listed on WiSACWIS, but did not consistently describe the findings of these referrals.
- Reasons for screening decisions were unclear in three cases.

Initial Assessment (IA)

Sample size: 50 cases (10 from each site) were reviewed.

Strengths:

- Sound placements were made to ensure child safety.
- Cases referred to the Safety Services program had specific services identified at the time of the referral to the program.
- Families reported favorable interactions with the initial assessment social worker.
- Sound decisions for case disposition, whether to transfer, close or continue a case following the completion of the initial assessment, were made.

Concerns:

- There were limited efforts to involve fathers during the initial assessment process.
- One-third of the cases had an inadequate assessment of underlying causes for the referral.
- Documentation of information gathered, that would normally be expected, was missing, including documentation of collateral contacts.

Independent Investigations

Sample size: 25 investigations of alleged maltreatment in licensed foster homes. (Per Statute, BMCW contracts with an outside agency to conduct these investigations).

Strengths:

- Investigations were thorough, addressed all concerns and demonstrated good quality overall.
- Foster parents interviewed during the review considered the investigators fair and impartial and reported the investigator was interested in gathering the information necessary to make a sound determination.
- The determination of maltreatment followed directly from the documentation and explanation provided by the investigators.

Concerns:

- The method of documenting interviews made it difficult to determine if *CPS Standards of Investigation* were followed with respect to interview protocol.
- Poor communication between programs was noted when independent investigations were being conducted.

Out-of-Home Care

Sample size: 27 cases were selected for review; including nine children who had been in Placement Stabilization Centers, nine in assessment foster homes and nine in Adolescent Assessment Centers.

Strengths:

- For cases where there had been a foster home placement, 80% had updated support plans that were specific to the foster parents and child.
- Assessment home providers acknowledged sufficient support provided by the OHC coordinators.
- Teen residents reported feeling safe and that the center's staff cared about them.

Concerns:

- There is a lack of placement resources for adolescents
- Many of the support plans created for foster homes in which children had been moved to the stabilization centers were generic.
- The assessments of children's needs provided by the centers lacked depth.

- Assessment home providers have no formal or standardized method for sharing their assessment of a child's needs with BMCW staff.
- Adolescent Assessment Centers and Placement Stabilization Centers are intended to serve different populations. The review showed that children have been inappropriately placed in both types of centers.
- The length-of-stay requirements are being exceeded.

Ongoing Case Management

Sample size: 50 ongoing cases (ten from each site) were reviewed, including.

Strengths:

- Placement decisions were well made and considered the child's needs.
- Improved service planning and selection was seen since the 2004 review.
- Improved effort to engage families was evident.
- Good contact was maintained with service providers.
- Coordinated Service Team (CST) meetings are occurring regularly.

Concerns:

- Documentation lacked justification for changes of placement.
- Actions taken to ensure visitation decreased in 2005.
- Concurrent planning is not well understood or used appropriately.
- CST meetings do not consistently involve all case participants.

Safety Services

Sample Size: 25 cases (five from each site) were reviewed.

Strengths:

- Based on interviews with families, they are generally appreciative of intervention efforts and describe good relationships with safety service workers.
- Most cases included documentation of regular contact with the family.
- In 60% of the cases, the reasons for closing were clear and complete, and the families were referred to community services when appropriate.
- Safety service managers were attentive to safety concerns in the families.

Concerns:

- Not all family members are consistently assessed, especially for chemical dependence or mental health issues; parents were not fully assessed in 12 cases (48%).
- Coordinated Service Team staffings were not clearly delineated in both the documentation and in the families' perceptions of their meetings with safety managers.
- The measure of *efforts to engage family in service* received the lowest scores mainly because fathers were not part of planning or services.
- Continued service needs were not addressed at the time of closing for three cases (12%).

Adoption

Sample size: 25 cases that were open for services with a primary staff person assignment in Ongoing Case Management and a secondary staff assignment to an adoption worker with Children's Service Society of Wisconsin were reviewed.

Strengths:

- Adoption workers demonstrated more involvement with on-going case managers, out-of-home care staff, family members and services providers, which facilitated better case planning.
- Individualized and targeted recruitment efforts to find appropriate permanent placements for children with unique needs were evident.
- Thorough and timely assessment of families and children was noted.
- Communication between adoption staff and caregivers improved compared to past reviews.
- Increased attendance at CST meetings was noted.

Concerns:

- Poor documentation across all areas of the program was noted.
- Advocacy by adoption workers on behalf of families and children when barriers to permanency are identified is lacking.
- Adoption workers report spending little time interacting and preparing children for adoption.
- Life Books are not being completed for children.

Conclusions and Final Recommendations

The BMCW and its partner agencies have developed the framework for best practice in child welfare. This partnership recognizes that the strengths or practical concerns in one program can impact all others. Improvements have been made across all program areas. It is recommended, however, that all programs continue to focus on the following identified areas where practice needs to be strengthened across all child welfare program areas:

- Strengthen meaningful engagement with biological parents, children, out-of home caregivers, and between child welfare professionals involved with the child. Specific collaborative strategies are needed to engage biological fathers, incarcerated parents, and relative caregivers in realistic decision making on placement and permanency planning for their children.
- Provide greater clarification to biological families, foster parents and service providers and their role as team members in implementing the CST process.
- Conduct and use assessments that contain comprehensive and descriptive information. The information should include: child safety, development, physical and mental health status, and the underlying causes of maltreatment, as well as the capacity, functioning and needs of parents, and the ability of out-of home caregivers to care for the child.
- Improve timely information sharing and communication across program areas that is critical to the success of a coordinated child welfare system.
- Maintain frequent, consistent and quality interactions with children by child welfare professionals as a necessary component to a quality assessment and reinforce as a standard of child welfare practice.
- Plan and implement visitation between children, their parents and siblings, and evaluate the impact on the stability of out-of-home placement and achieving timely permanence.
- Develop and implement individualized support and service plans that match the identified needs of the child, parent and caregiver. Improve coordination and communication within and between programs and service providers (private and public) regarding consistency and timeliness of support and services.
- Strengthen and improve timely and descriptive documentation regarding problem solving, contacts with parents, caretakers and service providers about needed services, placement decisions, permanency plans and outcomes.

- Give attention to improving documentation by supervisors about their oversight and direction of case activities.
- Improve quality of case management provided to Kinship families caring for children in out-of-home care, and to foster parents; to ensure child safety and placement stability.
- Identify realistic permanency options and appropriately use concurrent permanency planning, especially in cases where the child has been in out-of-home care for more than 24 months.
- Collaborate on strategies to address the overall lack of foster homes, specifically for adolescents, and the impact on all programs when a child is placed in an out-home-care home or center and their needs are not met.
- Develop and conduct cross program training as a collaboration between BMCW and its contract agency partners, including the University of Wisconsin (UW-M) Training Partnership, for all child welfare supervisors regarding a coordinated response to children and families through:
 - comprehensive and integrated assessments,
 - placement decisions that ensure the safety and permanency of children,
 - realistic and timely permanency planning,
 - development of strategies associated with concurrent permanency planning,
 - training of child welfare supervisors from all programs together not as an individual unit,
 - inclusion of out-of home caregivers, kinship providers and assessment and placement stabilization center staff in cross training,
 - incorporating case studies indicating best practice into training.
- Strengthen the relationship between programs, network service providers, and community resources, in order to ensure timely and coordinated service delivery.

Overall, program areas demonstrated consistency in their efforts to address concerns noted in prior comprehensive reviews. As indicated in the current report, each program area demonstrated improvements and sustained performance since 2003. In areas where programs fell short of their 2004 performance, it is recommended that all programs will be as diligent as they have been in developing and implementing targeted strategies to address performance concerns identified in the 2005 review.